

Realizing Human Rights in Illinois:

A Report on the From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign Action Forums

February 2008



About the Publisher

Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights is a service-based human rights organization advancing the human rights and responding to the human needs of endangered populations – particularly the poor, the isolated, and the displaced – through the provision of comprehensive and respectful services and the promotion of permanent solutions leading to a more just global society.

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Executive Summary

Hope. Equality. Opportunity. Dignity. Respect. Justice.

These are the words people from across Illinois used to describe human rights. To these evocative terms, people added the more tangible:

Housing. Health Care. Food. Education. Living Wage.

As the *From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign: Realizing Human Rights in Illinois* traveled from Carlinville to Evanston to Madison to Chicago's west side, individuals from across Illinois at 20 different forums throughout 2007 spoke to the reality that poverty is the absence of these human rights. This understanding fueled thoughtful, involved conversations about the barriers for people experiencing poverty and the solutions that need to be in place to give people real opportunity. While hundreds of ideas were shared by the over 700 individuals that participated in the forum process, particular overarching themes came to the fore:

- **Barrier:** Our society has not made addressing poverty a priority.
- **Solution:** Create a focused vision and plan to prioritize bringing ending poverty.
- **Barrier:** The experience of poverty is difficult for individuals, families, and communities.
- **Solution:** Adapt systems and supports for those experiencing poverty to make their lives easier and affirm their dignity.
- **Barrier:** The different obstacles that are associated with poverty – housing, health care, child care, jobs, education and training, transportation, and food – all intersect.
- **Solution:** Create mechanisms for poverty to be addressed holistically, reflecting how these issues impact each other.

Participants came away from these forums with specific ideas about what actions they can take in their community and a renewed drive to address poverty throughout the state, using human rights principles and values to fuel their efforts.

In response to these conversations and this enthusiasm across the state, the *From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign* is advancing legislation in Illinois to create a Commission on Poverty Eradication in Illinois, grounded in international human rights standards, which would develop a strategic plan to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015 in Illinois. With over 180 organizations, faith communities, and governments, as well more than 1,100 individuals from every legislative district in the state, this campaign is building a movement toward change that will make freedom from poverty a reality in Illinois.

The From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign

The *From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign: Realizing Human Rights in Illinois* was established to create a comprehensive vision and a workable plan grounded in human rights standards that will halve extreme poverty in Illinois by the year 2015. The campaign contextualizes poverty within the human rights framework, facilitates conversations across parties and interests in order to build shared understanding and urgency, uses our collective knowledge to identify solutions, and leverages our collective commitment to human rights to press for real change.

The campaign is guided by the following beliefs:

- 1) Freedom from poverty is a human right.
- 2) Education on human rights and access to opportunity is a necessary component to removing existing barriers.
- 3) All human rights – civil, political, economic, social, and cultural – are indivisible, interrelated, and interdependent.
- 4) Inequality and discrimination play a central role in the existence of poverty.
- 5) Those living in poverty must be engaged in the development, adoption, and enforcement of policies that grant freedom from poverty.
- 6) Poverty eradication will be progressively realized and is subject to the availability of resources.
- 7) Poverty eradication requires specific, measurable plans and policies.

Working from these core principles, the campaign educates individuals and communities throughout the state on how to end poverty through realizing human rights. Since the campaign's launch on Human Rights Day in December 2006, over 1,100 individuals and 180 organizations and faith communities covering every legislative district in Illinois have endorsed the campaign and declared they believe freedom from poverty is a human right. This growing movement will work with the members of the Illinois legislature in 2008 to establish a Commission on Poverty Eradication that will implement the steps necessary to realize the preamble to the Illinois Constitution, which states that a fundamental goal of Illinois is to eliminate poverty.

As we move forward, the campaign is continuing to engage individuals and organizations, especially those living in poverty, from throughout the state in this process by providing human rights education and meaningful avenues for supporting this important work. In addition, the campaign continues to involve elected and appointed officials toward the establishment of a poverty eradication strategy that will have substantive, measurable goals to move the state toward eradicating extreme poverty and dramatically reducing overall poverty.

The Action Forum Process

In order to eradicate poverty in Illinois, it is critical that those living in poverty play a central role in identifying both the barriers to opportunity that they face and what needs to be done to remove those barriers. Those experiencing poverty know better than anyone what barriers keep them from having real opportunity, and what solutions they need in their lives to become self-sufficient. The action forums provided a formal opportunity for individuals, organizations, and communities to tell their stories and become part of a larger human rights movement.

Each of the forums brought together a wide range of individuals – people experiencing poverty, individuals working with an organization addressing issues of poverty, local and state elected officials, concerned citizens, and others – to discuss poverty and opportunity in their community. All of the forums had the following components:

- A presentation of data on the current state of poverty in Illinois and the community where the forum was held.
- Small and large group conversations about the barriers faced by those experiencing poverty.
- Small and large group conversations about what must be done to provide real opportunity to those experiencing poverty.
- A presentation on the *From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign*, including an introduction to poverty as a human rights issue.

Beginning in January 2007, the *From Poverty to Opportunity Campaign* held 20 action forums across the state of Illinois with over 700 individuals participating in the process. Forums held outside of Cook and Champaign counties were co-presented by the Illinois Coalition for Community Services (ICCS), which is committed to empowering people to determine the direction of their communities through education, advocacy, and grassroots organizing. ICCS played a critical role in organizing and doing outreach for the majority of the action forums.

From Poverty to Opportunity Action Forum Locations*



**Three forums were held in Chicago*

Poverty in Illinois

“I think that the middle class has a lot more in common with people on the bottom rung than they realize because they can be there in a heart beat.”

-Stacey

In Illinois:

- **678,518** people live in **extreme poverty**.
- **1,389,281** people live in **poverty**.
- **531,628 children** live in poverty.

All data from: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, calculation conducted by the Mid-America Institute on Poverty of Heartland Alliance.

Income Poverty:

2007 Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

Family Size	Income Guideline
1	\$10,210
2	\$13,690
3	\$17,170
4	\$20,650

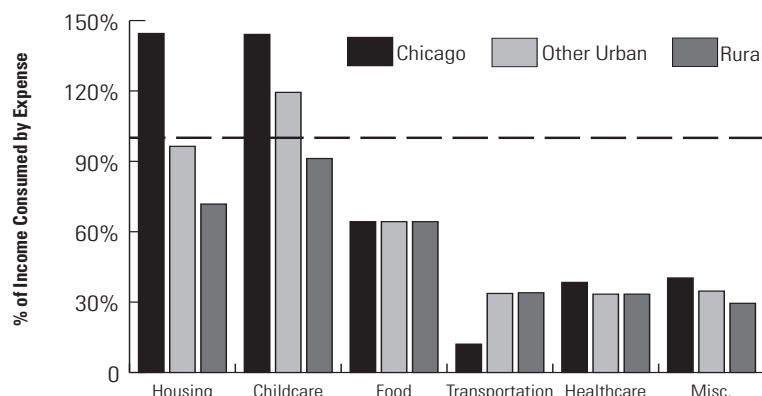
Extreme or Deep Poverty: living below 50% FPL

Low-Income or Near Poor: living below 200% FPL – struggle to meet basic needs due to rising costs

Individuals from every race, ethnic group, age, and gender live in extreme poverty. However, there are some groups more prone to living in extreme poverty. For example:

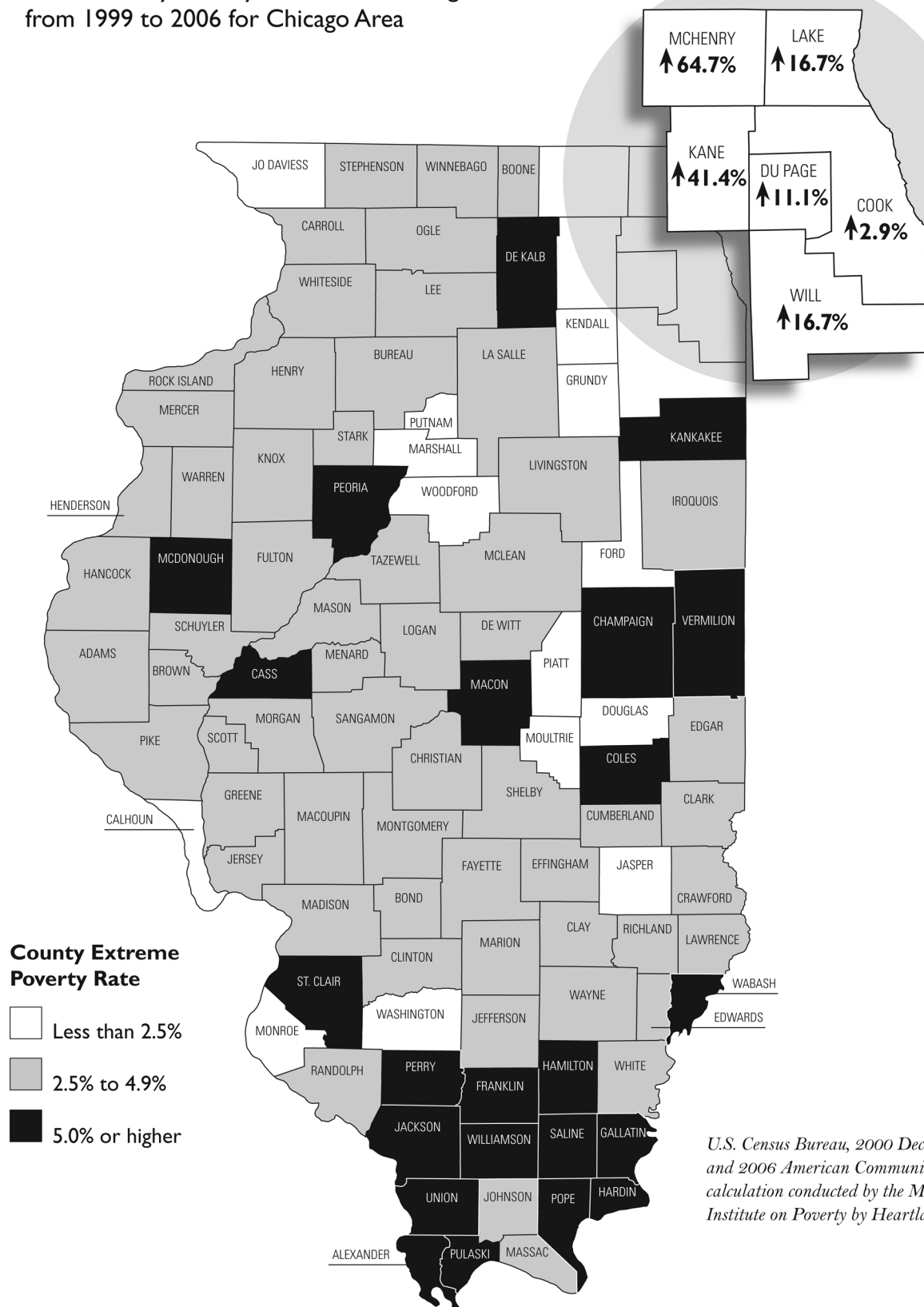
- Senior women are **61 percent more likely** to be living in extreme poverty than senior men.
- Individuals without a high school diploma are **three times more likely** to be living in extreme poverty than someone with a college degree
- **One in 33** white Non-Hispanics and slightly **over one in five** African-Americans in Illinois are in extreme poverty.
- Working age women who have never married are **68 percent more likely** to be living in extreme poverty than working age men that have never married.

An Illinois family of three in extreme poverty has a monthly income of **less than \$692**. Without any assistance, the majority of the family's income can be consumed by just one basic necessity, leaving many other important needs unmet.



Extreme Poverty in Illinois: A Map

1999 Rates by County and Percent Change
from 1999 to 2006 for Chicago Area



U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census and 2006 American Community Survey, calculation conducted by the Mid-America Institute on Poverty by Heartland Alliance.

Action Forum Discussion Summary

A wide range of issues were discussed over the year-long forum process. Depending on who participated in a particular forum or where in the state the forum took place, different topics came to the fore. While it is not possible to include all the different ideas and stories collected during the process in this report, this summary reflects the major issues and themes that emerged in most, if not all, of the forums. Included in this summary are quotes from either the group discussion or one-on-one interviews with individuals experiencing poverty. Some names and locations are omitted to protect privacy.

Poverty as a Priority

Barriers

“There is a lack of political will to address these issues.”

-Forum Participant, Madison

At every forum, a lack of political will was discussed. During their conversations on this topic, forum participants noted that this lack of will comes from different places. They noted that too often elected officials that care about the issue of poverty do not have enough constituents voicing support for their work, thus the elected officials are reluctant to take leadership on such issues. People also noted the ignorance, willful or otherwise, about the poverty in their community.

Participants also spoke to how some elected officials are beholden to those with resources and power. As a result, the needs of those experiencing poverty too often are not adequately addressed. Moreover, people noted that it is often not a question of whether we as a society have the resources to fundamentally address poverty, but rather how we chose to use those resources.

“People are caught in a web.”

-Forum Participant, Springfield

Throughout the forums, participants regularly spoke to how different issues – housing, health care, food, education, income supports, and others – intersect. People experiencing poverty not only have a housing problem, they also have a health care problem, an education problem. At multiple action forums, participants pointed to the lack of medical professionals that accept Medicaid or AllKids in Southern Illinois, creating great distances for many between where they live and where they can get medical attention. Many times this distance requires crossing county lines. For those experiencing poverty, many do not have their own vehicle to use for traveling this distance and would need to rely on public transportation systems. It is typical for public transportation to be county-based, thus it cannot be used to cross into another county. Consequently, a transportation problem is also a health care problem.

“God forbid you make five dollars over the eligibility limit.”

-Stacey

Support systems often fail to line up with people’s real life needs. People noted how some benefits, such as child care, have income limits that undercut a family’s ability to build their own safety net. In other words, in some instances getting a small raise will increase the parents co-pay and completely eliminate the financial cushion the raise would have provided. For many families, such a change in assistance is an impediment to moving beyond poverty.

Similarly, it was repeatedly noted that people experiencing poverty have a difficult time accessing the available resources and needed income supports. At the forum in Charleston, a conversation about solutions steered toward creating a resource list that different social service agencies could use to refer clients to services. Individuals began noting the different places and resources that would need to be on that list, as well as the rules or limitations for each form of assistance. In the midst of this conversation, one participant pointed out that the need to even have this conversation – to put time and energy into making a list of the different places a person facing hardship needs to go to get opportunity – is the problem. Why can’t access to these services be centralized? Why can’t community-based organizations enroll individuals in needed programs? Why are we making accessing supports a full-time job?

In that same vein, on Chicago’s west side, people remarked about how some social service programs use the same model and process regardless of the realities and specific needs of different populations and locations. This observation reflects comments at some forums outside of Chicago. In many small towns, people felt there is no anonymity – everyone knows everyone else, thus those that need available income supports are hesitant to apply for them for fear of the community knowing. Without adapting programs to reflect this dynamic in the community, there will continue to be a gap between those that are eligible for particular programs and those utilizing them.

“Just because we may not have as much money as other families, my family still works hard, encourages education, and believes all people should be treated fairly.”

-“Linda”

Not only do many resources fail to reflect the real life needs of individuals experiencing poverty, but too often the humanity of those experiencing poverty is diminished. Throughout the forums, individuals experiencing poverty and others noted how stereotypes and assumptions are readily applied to people who are experiencing poverty. They are categorized as “lazy” or “irresponsible,” which diminishes their individual stories and specific hardships. Participants noted that these broad categorizations were reflected in the way some services are delivered and also impact how those experiencing poverty view themselves. Phrases like “a lack of hope” and “a lack of empowerment” were discussed at many forums to point to how many people experiencing poverty have internalized the narrative written about them, making them feel that there is little reason to believe they can access real opportunity.

Solutions

“Poverty is something that is real. And the only way poverty can be met is if people come out and see the concerns. Go into the house and see how they are living.”

- “John”

Throughout the forum process, participants stated that in order for all of the specific issues that impact poverty to be adequately addressed, society as a whole needs to make focusing on poverty a priority. While individuals regularly spoke to the need to engage their elected officials and press them to take leadership on addressing poverty, they noted clearly that such leadership will not happen unless individuals from all parts of society join together to raise their collective voice.

One component to getting Illinois residents to work together in addressing poverty is making sure that people across the state understand what living in poverty really means. People often suggested that the stories of those that have experienced poverty need to be documented and shared. As one participant in Kankakee noted, “we need a campaign with a face that shows people that poverty affects everyone.”

Participants also noted that the solutions lie in addressing poverty holistically. As one individual in at the forum in Chicago Heights said, “[It is] a package deal – all the solutions are inter-related. A change in one requires change in others.” This approach means having substantive conversation across issues and population, noting, for example, where the quality affordability of housing intersects with access to jobs.

“Communities need to pull together and help each other—feel obligated to help because we’re all human beings.”

-Forum Participant, Vienna

At the Kankakee forum, a participant talked about how there used to be a tradition in rural communities where farmers would distribute crops that they could not sell to those that are hungry in the community. This person noted that too often this sense of community and shared responsibility is lacking.

While the forums focused on solutions that could be worked on at a statewide-level, participants often talked about ways in which they locally could address barriers. Both those experiencing poverty and those that work in the human services spoke of local solutions that would improve communication among providers and with those in need of the resources they provide. For example, in Carlinville, the group discussed posting comprehensive listings of resources available in the community in places that people go to on a regular basis – such as the laundromat, the grocery store, and the gas station.

In the same vein, participants discussed the need for this type of communication and coordination on a larger scale. Participants discussed the need to simplify the application process for assistance and supports when they are in need and expand the number of places that people can apply. They also spoke to the need to make working and utilizing supports more integrated so that a job is not an impediment to accessing

needed resources. On a more basic level, participants discussed how the amount of the support, such as the Temporary Aid to Needy Families program or Social Security Disability Insurance, should reflect the real needs of the families and allow them adequate income to live a dignified life.

Jobs & Training

Barriers

“Let’s face it; a minimum wage just doesn’t cut in our world today.”

-“Linda”

Over and over again, participants noted how the lack of decent work kept individuals in poverty. They pointed to the loss of higher paying jobs in their area, and to how those jobs that do exist either pay near the minimum wage with few benefits or if they do pay a living wage, the jobs require education and training that is difficult to access. Participants often noted the central role good employment plays in the strength of a family and community, and how the loss of a large employer, particularly in smaller communities, affects not only those that lose their job but the well-being of the entire community.

Participants repeatedly lamented the lack of skills-based or vocational training. In Vienna, participants noted that living wage jobs go unfilled because individuals with the necessary training cannot be found to fill them. People noted how high schools offer fewer vocational programs, and that people outside of high school who are in minimum wage positions do not have access to training that could move them into living wage jobs. In Clinton, participants discussed how there is a “stigma” around post-secondary education outside of college, which suppresses both the opportunities and the information about them.

Solutions

“We need to raise wages—the minimum wage is not enough to support a family.”

-Forum Participant, Springfield

“We need to set up a system where people can be trained and educated well in order to be able to do an honest day’s work.”

-Forum Participant, Evanston

Participants consistently pointed to the gap between the amount of income derived from a minimum wage job and the cost of basic needs. While individuals applauded the recent rise in the minimum wage in the state, they noted that what is truly needed is a living wage, one that allows a family to cover all of its costs without outside assistance. For those that are not making a living wage, the income supports they need to fill in the gap between income and costs need to be easily accessible and help individuals develop assets so self-sufficiency can be achieved.

While more and more jobs are lower-paying positions in the service industry, many participants noted that in their communities there are still positions that pay well and provide benefits but require particular training in order to qualify. Forum participants felt one key to helping individuals access living wage jobs was through more skill-based training opportunities. People noted these opportunities need to exist in our high schools, but also as a post-secondary option for people of all ages in both the community college setting, but also at community-based organizations that may be more accessible and less intimidating.

Housing

Barriers

“Finding decent housing is always, always, always a barrier.”

-Scott

Individuals in extreme poverty cannot find safe, decent, affordable housing. In Kankakee, people spoke to the irony of the lack of affordable housing while there is a surplus of vacant buildings. Forum participants in Rock Island noted how the lack of affordable housing is pushing people out of the community. Individuals in Clinton talked about how housing choice vouchers, the primary resource for affordable housing for families experiencing poverty, were next to non-existent in some of their communities. These observations around supply were augmented by concerns about the quality and location on housing. In Maywood, participants noted the there is a mismatch between where jobs are located and where people can find affordable housing, while in Vienna, many noted that much of the affordable housing stock is in poor condition and not safe for families.

Solutions

“Continue and increase the subsidies provided to landlords so they can provide housing to individuals that are low income.”

-Forum Participant, Maywood

Over and over, participants stated that more resources need to be invested in affordable housing. They noted that both the federal government and the state need to make housing a critical issue. In addition, they often noted that “affordable” needs to reflect the most vulnerable – those in extreme poverty, those experiencing homelessness, and those with severe disabilities. Individuals in Charleston spoke to the need to expand supportive housing, which provides the most vulnerable populations with needed housing and case management to ensure they can maintain their housing and access opportunities. In addition to making housing more affordable, participants spoke to solutions for improving the quality of housing, such as having basic maintenance standards that can be enforced for rental housing and ensure the housing is safe and habitable.

Health Care

Barriers

“Doctors and dentists in this area won’t accept AllKids and Medicaid.”

- Forum Participant, Vienna

Access to quality, affordable health care was consistently discussed. One participant discussed how while she had Medicaid, her ability to use it was severely limited. She noted her current need for a root canal and that only one dentist in her area would accept her insurance, and that dentist had limited the number of Medicaid patients he would see each month. As a result, the earliest appointment she could get for this important procedure was 5 months away.

Too often people find themselves in jobs that do not offer health insurance or the health insurance provided through their employer is too expensive to purchase. Participants noted that these constraints force individuals to only seek medical attention in dire situations, relying on the emergency room for their primary care. This was especially true in areas like Clinton, where participants noted a lack of clinics that provide free care to the uninsured. As a result, preventive care is not a real option.

Solutions

“We need universal health care.”

-Forum Participant, Evanston

Affordable, accessible, quality health care: the need is evident throughout the state. Participants spoke to the vital role that proper health care plays in people’s lives. While there was a clear call for universal health care, participants often noted that any broad health care plan needs to ensure that health care professionals will accept it and that the quality of health care provided is not compromised. Moreover, participants in Evanston stated that health care is not just about physical health, but also mental health, and that those two areas of health care need to be treated equally. Finally, an expanded health care system needs to encourage and reward preventive health care measures that help individuals avoid more severe health problems in the future.

Transportation

Barriers

“It is especially bad in rural areas. There is no mass transit or information about transportation options.”

- Participant, Clinton

The effectiveness of many of the supports and systems available to people that experience poverty hinges on a person’s ability to access them. For many, this is simply the ability to get from here to there. At the Carlinville forum, one participant spoke of

being laid off from his factory job due to its closing and how he was trying to take classes at the closest community college, Lincoln, to gain skills to access another living wage job. The problem was his car was unreliable at best, and when it was working, he could not afford the gas to drive back and forth. With no public transportation option available to him, he had to discontinue his education.

In different parts of the state, different transportation barriers were voiced. In Madison, people spoke to how the bus system shut down too early so people that worked late-shift jobs could not use it to get to and from work. In Chicago, individuals discussed the high cost of using public transportation for those in poverty. In Vienna, people discussed how the transportation system does not link people to the communities where jobs exist.

Solutions

“Around the Clock 24-hour Public Transportation.”

-Forum Participant, Madison

Transportation solutions look different depending upon the area of the state being discussed. In Chicago, participants discussed the need to keep fares at a cost that people experiencing poverty can afford, while in Madison the discussion centered on expanding the transit system’s limited geographic scope and hours. The participants in Clinton discussed the need for a county-wide transit system that also integrated regional cooperation. Regardless of these different needs, participants spoke to the desire for transportation systems to reflect the community.

Education

Barriers

“We have a two-tiered education system.”

-Forum Participant, Evanston

Education was regularly recognized as a key to moving beyond poverty. Participants regularly discussed the imbalance that exists in funding K-12 education in Illinois. This imbalance, caused by an over reliance on property taxes to fund schools, results in children living in high poverty districts often getting a lower-quality education. As one participant in Rockford noted, the least qualified teachers often end up teaching in the schools with the most challenges. On Chicago’s south side, participants noted that these limited resources manifest in programs that “cherry pick” the highest achieving students for special opportunities, leaving the vast majority of students that do not qualify for those special opportunities with few options.

Solutions

“Create a more equitable education system.”

-Forum Participant, Aurora

Participants wanted fundamental reform the system for funding K-12 education. The over-reliance on property taxes needs to be replaced with a more stable and equitable system. Other key changes would stem from this fundamental reform. Participants in Rockford and Chicago Heights spoke to the need to increase pay to teachers in underperforming school districts to attract the best educators. At the forum on Chicago’s south side, participants discussed the need to look holistically at education, including expanding after-school programs.

Food

Barriers

“Food prices have also increased which makes it more difficult to feed our family.”

-“Linda”

Too many people across Illinois rely on food pantries to make sure their families are fed. In Champaign, participants remarked that there is no reason for children to be going hungry in a society as wealthy as ours. Participants in Rockford pointed out how the lack of adequate food impacts other aspects of people’s lives, such as how children who do not have food at home cannot concentrate in school and, thus, do poorly. Moreover, people at various forums talked about how it is more than simply accessing food, but also the quality of that food.

Solutions

“We must eliminate child hunger.”

-Forum Participant, Urbana

In Carlinville, a lengthy discussion occurred around getting all those who are eligible for free and reduced school lunches or Food Stamps enrolled in either or both program. People spoke to the stigma attached to receiving such help and pushed for solutions that would increase the anonymity of using such supports. At other forums, participants discussed the number of families that rely on the local food pantries at the end of the month to fill in the gap, and the need to ensure those pantries have adequate, nutritious supplies.

Discrimination

Barriers

“When you talk about poverty... you must also have a conversation about race.”

-Forum Participant, Kankakee

As remarked on Chicago’s south side, there has been a “history of disenfranchisement” that cannot not be isolated from the reality of poverty. People at forums noted that both overt and covert racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia limited individuals’ economic and social opportunities. This discrimination manifests itself in communities with both large and small minority populations. In Maywood, participants noted that continued patterns of segregation are compounded by a lack of services in those areas of minority concentration. People noted at most forums that this was an incredibly difficult barrier to address, but in order to truly tackle poverty, it cannot be ignored.

Solutions

“Address racism in our community—be open and honest.”

-Forum Participant, Springfield

The solutions offered around addressing discrimination were both short-term and long-term. In Madison, Springfield, Vienna, Kankakee, and other places, participants discussed the need to be upfront about the reality of discrimination in their community and its impact on perpetuating poverty. These solutions were focused on the need for building relations, having open conversations, and building trust among individuals and communities. More specifically, they spoke of the need to vigorously and proactively enforce our existing laws designed to protect individuals from discrimination. This enforcement needs to go beyond responding to acts of discrimination to actively instituting policies that ensure discrimination does occur in the first place. Moreover, we need to create mechanisms that allow us to begin breaking down the structural discrimination that exists in our society.

Re-Entering from the Prison System

Barriers

“There is a ‘no second chances’ attitude.”

-Forum Participant, Aurora

In urban and rural areas, participants voiced their frustration with how people who have paid their dues through a prison sentence are barred from accessing jobs, housing and other programs upon release that would allow them to re-integrate into society. As noted at the Maywood forum, these barriers not only put strains on those re-entering, but also put strains on the communities they reside in. People discussed that there is a

lack of supports both inside and outside the prison system to help ensure that individuals do not repeat their mistakes and return to prison.

Solutions

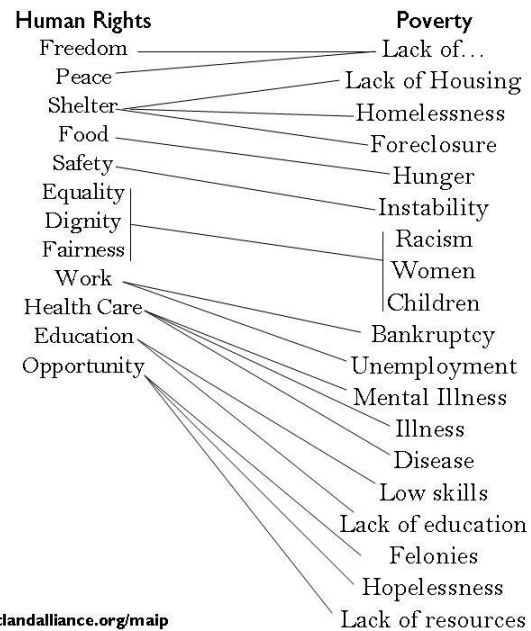
“Improve the reintegration process for people coming out of prison.”

-Forum Participant, Chicago’s west side

Participants in all parts of the state discussed ways to give real opportunity to people that have spent time in the prison system. In Murphysboro, participants talked about the need to improve and expand transitional assistance. On Chicago’s west side, people discussed the need to change the eligibility rules of programs that currently bar individuals with a felony in their past. People spoke to the need for our prison system to focus on rehabilitation so that individuals are prepared to make a new start upon release, and that there needs to be a system of resources and opportunities available so those coming out of prison can continue on their path to re-integration.

Poverty & Human Rights

At most of the forums, the group undertook a simple activity. First, we asked participants to say the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the words 'human rights.' Next, we asked them to say the first words that come to mind when they hear 'poverty.' Once these two lists were created, we started drawing lines and making connections, as in the example to the right from one forum. Every time participants engaged in this exercise, we would see two ends of the spectrum: Where 'housing' was listed under human rights, 'homelessness' was listed under poverty. Where people say 'health care' for human rights, they say 'illness' for poverty. Where people say 'opportunity' for human rights, they say 'barriers' for poverty. While most of the individuals that participated in the action forums had never thought about the relationship between poverty and human rights before, this exercise and the forum as a whole brought home for them a basic concept: **poverty is the absence of human rights.**



www.heartlandalliance.org/maip

The campaign connected this concept to the usually unknown pre-amble to the Illinois Constitution, which states:

"We, the People of the State of Illinois... in order to... eliminate poverty and inequality; assure legal, social and economic justice; provide opportunity for the fullest development of the individual; do ordain and establish this Constitution for the State of Illinois."

We as a state have not realized this vision. Participants' reactions to these words from our constitution ranged from frustration to anger to hopeful. Many were troubled by our failure to date to focus on this goal, while others saw it as a call to action; a call that the time is now to take these words and make them real to the hundreds of thousands of individuals that are experiencing poverty throughout the state; a call that through our collective action and voice, we can realize human rights and end poverty in Illinois.

The Commission on Poverty Eradication in Illinois

The proposed **Commission on Poverty Eradication** will be an independent body in Illinois focused on eradicating poverty in our state based on international human rights standards. More specifically, the commission will play two basic interwoven roles:

- 1) Create a specific, substantive, measurable strategic plan for cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015 in Illinois.
- 2) Offer advice and comment on state matters that may positively or negatively impact the state's goal of ending poverty.

A broad range of representatives, including elected and appointed officials, individuals experiencing poverty, and advocates for different issues and populations impacted by poverty will be appointed. With the creation of this commission, Illinois will have a long-standing entity that will ensure that we as a state are progressively moving toward realizing human rights in Illinois through reducing and eventually ending poverty.

While Illinois will be a leader in the growing movement to comprehensively address poverty, it will not be alone, as other states have recognized the value of creating focused plans:

- In 2004, **Connecticut** established the **Child Poverty Prevention Council** charged with creating a plan that will cut in half the number of children experiencing poverty by 2014.
- The **Successful Families Caucus** was established in 2007 to engage **Iowa** legislatures in considering comprehensive state policy that will begin to address the needs of Iowa's poorest families and communities.
- The House Speaker in **Alabama** created the **House Task Force on Poverty**. The Task Force expects to consider legislative proposals for the 2008 session. The Task Force includes legislators, nonprofit leaders, and people experiencing poverty.
- The **Minnesota** Legislature created the **Legislative Commission to End Poverty** in 2006. The Commission is to prepare recommendations on how to end poverty by the end of 2008 for consideration in the 2009 assembly.
- **Vision 2020** is a **Wisconsin** campaign to increase knowledge about child poverty, discuss solutions, and convince state policymakers that eliminating child poverty should be their top priority.
- In 2007, **Vermont** established a **Child Poverty Council** to create a ten-year plan to reduce child poverty by 50 percent. The Council will present their recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

What You Can Do to Help End Poverty in Illinois

Endorse the Campaign

Add your name, the name of your faith community, your city, your county, your township, or other groups you may belong to in order to continue building the human rights movement in Illinois. Simply go online to:

www.heartlandalliance.org/maip, and click “Endorse.”

Once there, you can indicate other ways you want to be involved in the campaign work toward ending poverty in Illinois. More importantly, spread the word so others can join the campaign.

Make Your Voice Heard

Let your legislators know that you want them to make ending poverty a top priority. When you endorse the campaign, be sure to sign up to receive action alerts that allow you to quickly communicate to elected officials about important issues that impact poverty.

Educate Yourself on the Issues Impacting Poverty and Human Rights

Sign up to receive email updates from the campaign when you endorse, and visit the campaign’s blog – povertytoopportunity.blogspot.com – where you will find news and information on poverty and human rights.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Abridged)¹

Article 1 – Right to Equality

Article 2 – Freedom from Discrimination

Article 3 – Right to Life, Liberty, Personal Security

Article 4 – Freedom from Slavery

Article 5 – Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment

Article 6 – Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law

Article 7 – Right to Equality before the Law

Article 8 – Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal

Article 9 – Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile

Article 10 – Right to Fair Public Hearing

Article 11 – Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty

Article 12 – Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, and Correspondence

Article 13 – Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country

Article 14 – Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution

Article 15 – Right to a Nationality and the Freedom to Change It

Article 16 – Right to Marriage and Family

Article 17 – Right to Own Property

Article 18 – Freedom of Belief and Religion

Article 19 – Freedom of Opinion and Information

Article 20 – Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Article 21 – Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections

Article 22 – Right to Social Security

Article 23 – Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions

Article 24 – Right to Rest and Leisure

Article 25 – Right to Adequate Living Standard

Article 26 – Right to Education

Article 27 – Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of Community

Article 28 – Right to a Social Order that Articulates this Document

Article 29 – Community Duties Essential to Free and Full Development

Article 30 – Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the above Rights

¹ University of Minnesota. (n.d.). *Human rights resource center*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.hrusa.org/default.htm>

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